

Message Text

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ACTION EA-14

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CIAE-00 INR-10 NSAE-00 DODE-00 OMB-01 PRS-01 DRC-01

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R 211222Z JAN 74

FM AMEMBASSY BANGKOK

TO SECSTA*E WASHDC 9932

C O N F I D E N T I A L BANGKOK 1149

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, TH

SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR'S DISCUSSION WITH THANAT KHOMAN

1. I SPENT AN HOUR IN A FREE-SWINGING GIVE AND TAKE WITH THANAT KHOMAN DURING A COURTESY CALL JANUARY 20. DCM ACCOMPANIED ME. WHILE THE DISCUSSION REVEALED LITTLE THAT WAS NEW, THIS FIRST-HAND EXPOSURE TO THE MAN WHO PLAYED SUCH A MAJOR ROLE IN BRINGING ABOUT THE U.S. PRESENCE IN THAILAND AND IS NOW ONE OF ITS MAJOR CRI*ICS WAS MOST USEFUL.

2. I LED OFF THE DISCUSSION WITH THE COMMENT THAT, AS U.S. AMBASSADOR, I WELCOMED THE VIEWS OF ALL RESPONSIBLE THAI AND LOOKED FORWARD IN PARTICULAR TO HIS COMMENTS ON U.S.-THAI REALATIONS IN VIEW OF HIS LONG AND CLOSE ASSOCIATION WITH THAT RELATIONSHIP. THANAT FOCUSED ON THREE MAJOR ISSUES:

A. U.S. PRESENCE. I NOTED THAT THE THAI PRESS HAD QUOTED THANAT AS FAVORING THE IMMEDIATE WITHDRAWAL OF ALL U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL. THANAT INTERRUPTED TO SAY HE HAD BEEN MISQUOTED AND THAT HE DID NOT FAVOR AN IMMEDIATE TOTAL WITHDRAWAL AND, IN FACT, HOPED FOR CONTINUED CLOSE U.S.-THAI RELATIONS. WHAT HE WAS ADVOCATING AS FAR AS THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE WAS CONCERNED WAS AN ACCELERATED RATE OF WITHDRAWAL. HE COMPLAINED REPEATEDLY ABOUT THE U.S. USING THAILAND AS A "PLATFORM" TO CARRY OUT ACTIONS
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IN INDOCHINA AND CHARGED THAT U.S. MILITARY PERSONNEL TOOK

THAILAND SO MUCH FOR GRANTED THAT THEY WERE ABLE TO UNDER-TAKE ACTIVITIES HERE THAT WOULD BE IMPOSSIBLE IN THE UNITED STATES. HE CHARGED ALSO THAT WE HAD PUT THAILAND IN A BAD LIGHT INTERNATIONALLY BY INCREASING THE SIZE OF OUR FORCES HERE AFTER THE JANUARY 1973 PARIS AGREEMENT. I WEIGHED IN TO CLARIFY THE FACT THAT THE INCREASE IN U.S. PERSONNEL HAD OCCURRED IN THE SPRING OF 1972 FOLLOWING HANOI'S OFFENSIVE AND THAT THERE HAD ACTUALLY BEEN A SIGNIFICANT REDUCTIONS SINCE SIGNATURE OF THE PARIS AGREEMENT. IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT THANAT WAS UNAWARE OF HIS FACTS AND WHEN HE SAW HE WAS LOSING THIS ARGUMENT HE SHIFTED TO THE NEXT SUBJECT.

B. U.S. CRITICISM OF THANAT. THANAT THEN COMPLAINED THAT, ALTHOUGH HE HAD ACTUALLY BEEN ONE OF OUR BEST FRIENDS AND HAD WORKED FOR YEARS TO ESTABLISH A SOUND U.S.-THAI RELATIONSHIP, WE DID NOT UNDERSTAND HIM AND REPEATEDLY ATTACKED HIM. HE MENTIONED IN PARTICULAR THAT DURING THE PAST YEAR OR SO U.S. OFFICIALS HAD ACCUSED HIM OF SHIFTING GROUND FROM HIS EARLIER ADVOCACY OF A STRONG U.S. PRESENCE AND ROLE IN SOUTHEAST ASIA. I SAID THERE HAD CERTAINLY BEEN NO OFFICIAL U.S. CRITICISM OF THANAT SINCE I HAD ARRIVED IN THAILAND AND THERE WOULD BE NONE. I NOTED THAT I WAS NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR WHAT MAY HAVE GONE BEFORE.

C. U.S. SUPPORT FOR MILITARY. THANAT THEN COMPLAINED THAT FOR YEARS WE HAD BACKED THE WRONG HORSE IN THAILAND BY SUPPORTING THE MILITARY. THANAT CHARGED THAT WE HAD FOSTERED AND SUPPORTED A MILITARY GOVERNMENT IN THAILAND IN ORDER TO PROSECUTE THE WAR IN INDOCHINA WITHOUT INTERFERENCE. AFTER HE MADE SOME ADDITIONAL REMARKS ALONG THESE LINES, I NOTED THAT WHILE THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE U.S. GOVERNMENT AND THE PREVIOUS THAI REGIME HAD BEEN CLOSE, IT HAD OBVIOUSLY BEEN MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL OR IT WOULD NOT HAVE CONTINUED SO LONG. I SAID THAT WHATEVER HAD GONE BEFORE, WE NOW HAD A MUCH DIFFERENT SITUATION WITH A NEW GOVERNMENT IN POWER IN BANGKOK, A NEW U.S. AMBASSADOR AND A MUCH CHANGED SITUATION. THE UNITED STATES GOVERNMENT FULLY SUPPORTS THAILAND'S EFFORTS TO ESTABLISH A DEMOCRATIC SYSTEM AND WE HAVE TOLD THE PRIME MINISTER AND OTHER OFFICIALS THAT WE ARE PREPARED TO HELP THEM, IN WAYS THEY FIND APPROPRIATE, CONFIDENTIAL

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IN BUILDING A VIABLE DEMOCRATIC ORDER.

3. AFTER THIS DEBATE, THANAT SHIFTED GROUND COMPLETELY AND COMPANIED THAT WE HAD MISSED A MAJOR OPPORTUNITY TO GAIN GOOD WILL IN THAILAND DURING THE RECENT FLAP OVER THE CIA LETTER BY NOT OFFERING THAILAND 50,000 TONS OF DIESEL OIL AT COMMERCIAL RATES. "INSTEAD, YOU FORCED US TO TURN TO PEKING". THANAT BOLSTERED HIS ARGUMENT FOR SPECIAL TREATMENT

WITH THE OBSERVATION THAT NO OTHER COUNTRY PERMITS THE UNITED STATES TO HOUSE SO MANY OF ITS AIRPLANES. I HAD THE CLEAR IMPRESSION THAT WHAT WAS REALLY BOTHERING THANAT WAS THE FACT THAT CHARTCHAI HAD GOTTEN THE HEADLINES AND GAINED THE CREDIT FOR GETTING DIESEL OIL FROM CHIAN RATHER THAN THANAT HIMSELF.

4. AFTER REVIEWING MY CONVERSATION WITH THE DCM IT APPEARS THAT THANAT IS MUCH LESS ACCURATE IN HIS FACTS THAN DURING HIS MANY YEARS AS FOREIGN MINISTER. HOWEVER, HE CONTINUES TO TRY THE SAME OLD TACTIC OF BEATING US OVER THE HEAD ON THE ONE HAND AND ASKING FOR SYMPATHETIC TREATMENT ON THE OTHER. THOUGH THANAT SEEMS OUT OF TOUCH WITH CURRENT PROBLEMS AND HIS VIEWS ARE NOT CONSISTENT, HIS ATTITUDE TOWARD THE U.S. MILITARY PRESENCE IS SHARED BY MANY OTHERS. I PLAN TO SEE HIM FROM TIME TO TIME TO CONTINUE THIS DIALOGUE. OUR RELATIONSHIP WILL BE HANDLED CAREFULLY SINCE HE IS ON THE OUTS WITH MANY OF THE PRESENT LEADERS.
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